

Overview and Scrutiny Management Board

27th November 18



Report of: Colin Molton

Title: High Streets/Local Centres Action Plan

Ward: Citywide

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Recommendation

To note this report and to provide a steer on how scrutiny would like to further inform the High Streets/Local Centres Action Plan

The significant issues in the report are:

The report covers the following

National Context

Bristol

High Streets Futures Research

Business Improvement Districts

City Centre Revitalisation

National Budget Announcements

West of England Combined Authority Love You High Street Funding

1. Summary

1.1 This report has been written to provide OSM with an overview of the national issues that are impacting on high streets/local centres. The report contains information on Bristol's high streets/local centres, and updates on the recent announcements made by central Government and the West of England Combined Authority that could provide opportunities for Bristol.

2. Context

National

2.1 The UK retail industry has seen an unprecedented level of change throughout the first half of 2018 and further changes are expected. Figures from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) revealed that these closures led to 80,000 retail job losses in the first half of the year. The national decline in high streets can be attributed to a large number of factors including:

- A historic reliance on a retail offer which is vulnerable to changing consumer habits such as opportunities for online shopping, out of town retail.
- A built environment often dominated by roads and cars rather than pedestrian focused.
- Often complex land ownership issues that make interventions challenging.

Bristol

2.2 The economic health and vibrancy of the city's high streets/local centres are vital e.g. employment, access to products and services, place making, tourism and income generation. There are roughly 16,000 business properties¹ within the City; approximately 7,000 of these¹ are located within our high streets/local centres.

2.3 The Bristol Local Plan highlights designated a network of 47 'town centres' –including City Centre, Town, District and Local Centres (see map in Appendix A). Overall, Bristol's high streets/local centres have a relatively low level of retail property vacancy rates, standing at 7.4% (Oct 2018) and ranging from City Centre at 10.2%, Town Centres 7.4% (avg), District Centres 4.9% (avg) and Local Centres 3.6% (avg).

2.4 Bristol City Centre's retail ranking in 2017 was 12th, a much improved performance compared to 27th in 2007, prior to the opening of Cabot Circus. However, Bristol's ranking is the lowest of all Core Cities apart from Sheffield.

High Streets Futures Research

2.5 The Council is in the process of developing a new High Streets/Local Centres Action Plan which will be used to inform policies, investment decisions and business support initiatives. The report will be completed in early 2019.

2.6 A survey is currently underway with residents/visitors, businesses, traders/community groups and property agents. A copy of the surveys which close on 2nd December can be found at <https://bristol.citizenspace.com/growth-regeneration/bristol-high-street-futures/>. The research will also be informed through the feedback received at the Mayors Hot Coffee/Hot Topic High Streets event which was held on 4th October.

¹ Estimate derived from Bristol business rates data

2.7 This research seeks to establish the current situation in Bristol, how Bristol competes and compares to other centres, growth or contraction within planning use classes, current level of vacancy within our high streets/local centres, suspected reasons for vacancies.

2.8 A desktop review of secondary research and examples of best practise is also being conducted. In 2014 Bristol participated in national research led by the Institute of Place Management which looked at the impact of changes to retailing. The research looked at factors that could influence the performance of high streets/local centres. The research identified there were 201 factors that influenced the performance of a high street/local centre. The 201 factors were then ranked by experts to identify firstly how important a factor was for vitality and viability, and secondly the extent to which a factor was controllable locally. The top five factors are listed below, further information can be found in Appendix B.

PRIORITY	CONSIDERATIONS
1. ACTIVITY HOURS	Ensuring the centre is open when the catchment needs it. What are the shopping hours? Is there an evening economy? Do the activity hours of the centre match the needs of the catchment?
2. APPEARANCE	Improving the quality of the visual appearance, e.g. the public realm. How clean is the centre?
3. RETAILERS & SERVICES	Offering the right type and quantity of retailers and other service providers. What retailers and service providers (private/public) are represented?
4. VISION&STRATEGY	Having a common vision and some leadership. Do the High Street stakeholders collaborate? Is the vision incorporated in local plans?
5. EXPERIENCE	Considering the quality of the experience. Measuring levels of service quality and visitor satisfaction. What is the overall experience of the centre?

2.9 The research will also be looking at the future including, what factors will impact high streets/local centres in Bristol in the future, what is the likely level of impact on the city, how resilient are Bristol’s high streets/local centres, where are the potential physical locations for growth and change. Finally we will be considering what short, medium and long term interventions may be needed to deal with or limit the impacts and take advantage of opportunities (for example promoting different types of development e.g. housing, employment) and are there high streets/local centres which need focused action plans.

Business Improvement Districts (BIDs)

2.10 Bristol has 5 business led BIDs, which cover all or part of a main high street/local centre (City Centre, Broadmead, Bedminster, Gloucester Road and Clifton Village). The BIDs represent over 2,000 businesses and through BID levies raise over £1.7m pa. The money raised through BID levies is invested in themes and priorities set out in each BIDs business plan.

Common themes and priorities for all Bristol BIDs are;

- Clean and green
- Marketing and promotion
- Events
- Street scene improvements

City Centre Revitalisation

2.11 The City Centre Revitalisation Group, started in July 2018, including key stakeholders with an interest in the economic vitality and future of the City Centre - BCC, Destination Bristol (including the City Centre and Broadmead Business Improvement Districts), Business West, University of Bristol, Bristol Hoteliers Association, Hammerson, Royal Institute of British Architects, Bristol at Night and a representative from the creative sector. The Group has identified four key themes, which will form the basis of a Revitalisation Plan:

- 24 hour Economy
- Identity – Culture, Tourism and Heritage
- Standards - City Centre Management
- Connections/Communication

2.12 The Group recognises work recently carried out, including the emerging City Centre Framework and Temple Quarter Master Plan.

2.13 In order to inform the Government's current review of high streets the Institute of Place Management (IPM) were requested by Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) to hold 5 workshops across the country. The workshops brought together high street stakeholders to develop some understanding of initiatives that have taken place in high streets and how the stakeholders see the future of their location. Bristol hosted a workshop on 12th September focussing on the City Centre. The information from the workshops is being written up and will form part of a report to Government. IPM believe information gathered from these workshops have played a key role in informing the recent national Budget announcements.

National Budget Announcements

Business Rates

2.14 Business rates are often highlighted as a major issue for high street businesses. Business rates for retailers with a rateable value of up to £51,000 will be cut by one third for 2019/2020 and 2020/2021. Local Authorities will be fully compensated for the loss of income. In Bristol over 4,000 business rate accounts receive Small Business Rate Relief.

Future High Streets Fund

2.15 A £675m Future High Streets Fund was announced to support local areas in England to prepare long term strategies for their high streets and town centres and then co-fund investment in town centre infrastructure, including helping increase access to high streets and support redevelopment and densification around high streets through allowing investment in land assembly. The expectation is that local authorities will partner with the private sector to develop proposals. The Fund is for high street change not for adding additional retail space. Full details of the Fund will be announced by the end of the year.

High Street Taskforce

2.16 The Future High Streets Fund will also support a new High Streets Taskforce. The aims of the Taskforce are to support local leadership and provide high streets and town centres expert advice to adapt and thrive. The Taskforce will be launched early next year.

Planning consultation

2.17 A planning consultation to help support change on the high street has opened and runs until 14th January 2019. The aim is to make it easier for high streets to adapt for the future, with a wider range of retail, residential and other uses, looking at conversion of retail space to homes or offices and the potential for mixed use schemes. A second consultation will be published soon, including how to support the more effective use of tools such as Compulsory Purchase Orders and Local Development Orders.

Digital Services Tax

2.18 The Government is currently consulting on a Digital Services Tax (DST) which will come into force in April 2020. The consultation closes in 28th February 2019. The DST will be applied to specific digital business activities including search engines, social media platforms and online marketplaces.

West of England Combined Authority Love You High Street Funding

2.19 The West of England Combined Authority announced on 1st November that they would be allocating £10m from their Investment Fund to support high streets.

2.20 Each Local Authority has been asked to nominate one high street to run a pilot project. Bedminster has been selected as Bristol's pilot, focusing in and around East Street. The pilot will support the development of currently underutilised or vacant spaces. The focus will be on bringing new types of uses into the area, strengthening and diversifying the current high street offer. Attracting businesses within the creative and digital sectors will be a priority.

2.21 The project will provide grants and support to property owners and business/community based occupiers. Support will include helping to identify other sources of funding or complementary support, potential developers and occupiers. If successful the project will safeguard and enhance the high street environment, increase the number of businesses and jobs in the area with a focus on providing opportunities for residents in adjacent communities, provide new homes, generate additional Business Rates or Council Tax income.

2.22 The criteria used for selecting the high street was based on a number of factors including; vacancy rate, strategic importance, availability of opportunity for intervention/change and potential for positive impact on Bristol's most deprived communities. We expect there to be a number of other high streets supported after the pilot and we will be giving further consideration to criteria.

2.23 At this stage we are bidding for £25,000 for the feasibility and development work which will be required to inform the full business case for the pilot project. Proposals will be considered at the West of England Combined Authority committee meeting on 30th November.

Appendices:

Appendix A – List and Map of Bristol's High Streets and Local Centres, as defined in the Core Strategy 2011

Appendix B- High Streets 2020, top 25 factors that can influence performance of high streets/local centres

LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

Background Papers:

None